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Insights into hours worked, March 2021

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Source: [Labour Force, Australia, March 2021](#)

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With many hours worked series returning to their pre-COVID levels, the ABS is planning to cease publishing this article on a monthly basis after the May 2021 issue. The ABS will continue to monitor changes in hours worked and provide additional analysis when relevant.

The March survey reference period was the first two weeks of March, prior to the end of the JobKeeper wage subsidy.

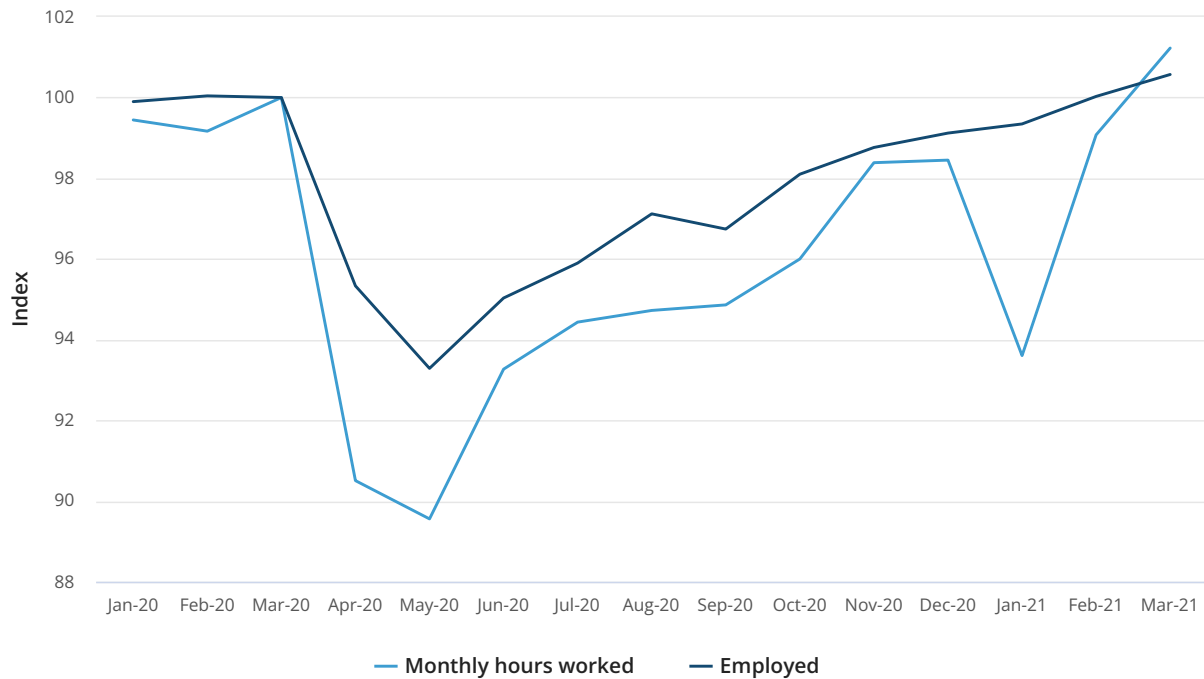
Hours worked and employment

Employment increased by 0.5% or 70,700 people (in seasonally adjusted terms) between February and March 2021, while hours worked increased by 2.2%. This rise in seasonally adjusted hours worked in March followed a large increase (5.8%) in February and a large decrease in January (-4.9%), when a larger than usual number of people took annual leave.

Chart 1 shows changes in hours worked and employment, indexed to March 2020, while Chart 2 shows monthly changes in hours worked and employment since March 2016. Both

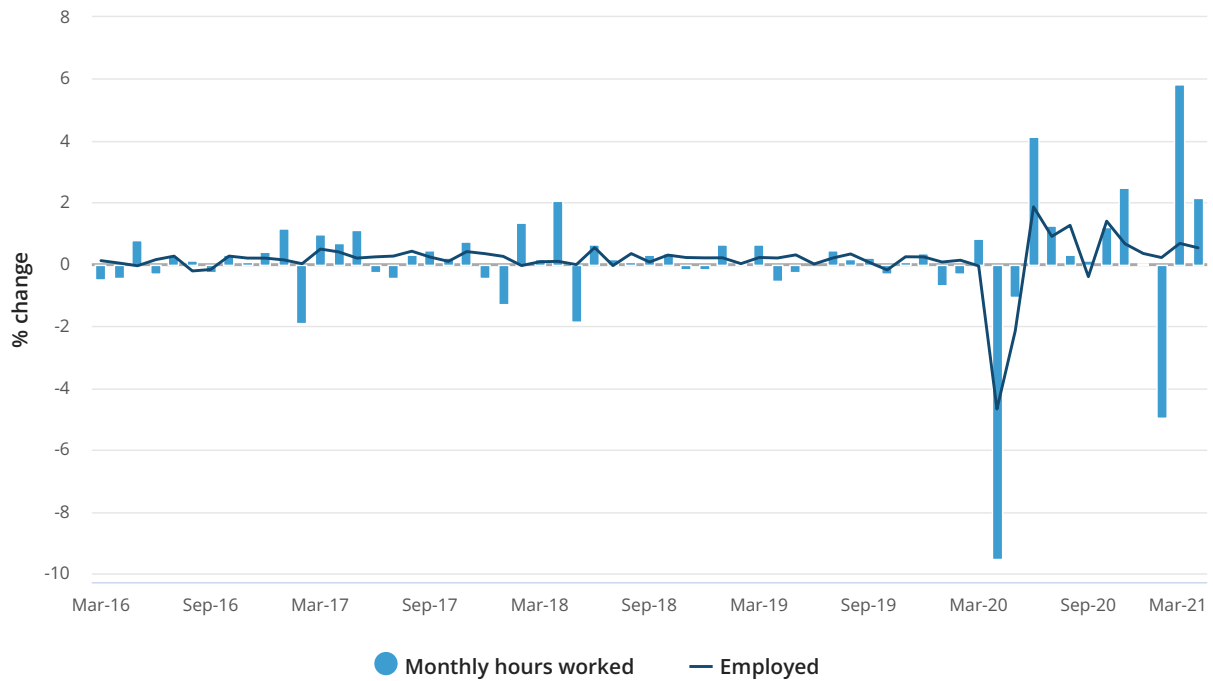
employment and hours worked in March 2021 had returned to the level in March 2020.

Chart 1: Hours worked and employment index, Seasonally adjusted (March 2020 = 100.0)



Source: Labour Force, Australia Tables 1 and 19

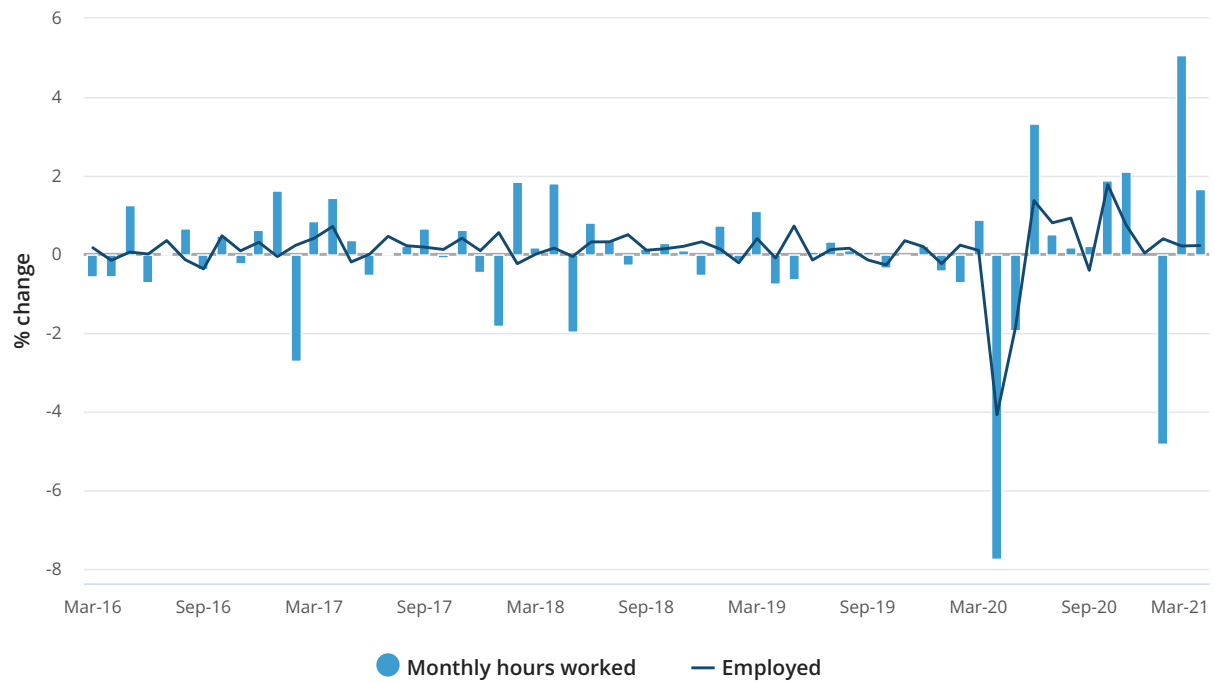
Chart 2: Monthly change in employment and hours worked, Seasonally adjusted



Source: Labour Force, Australia Tables 1 and 19

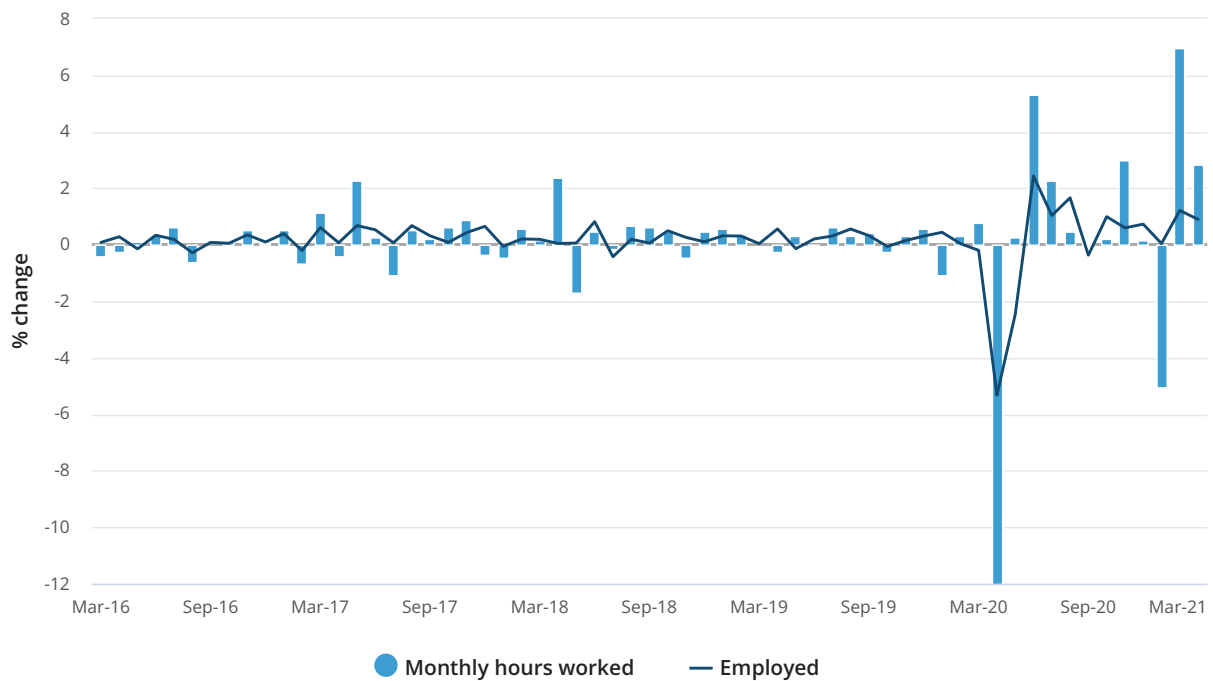
Changes in employment and hours worked for men and women

Table 2a: Monthly change in employment and hours worked, Males, Seasonally adjusted



Source: Labour Force, Australia Tables 1 and 19

Table 2b: Monthly change in employment and hours worked, Females, Seasonally adjusted

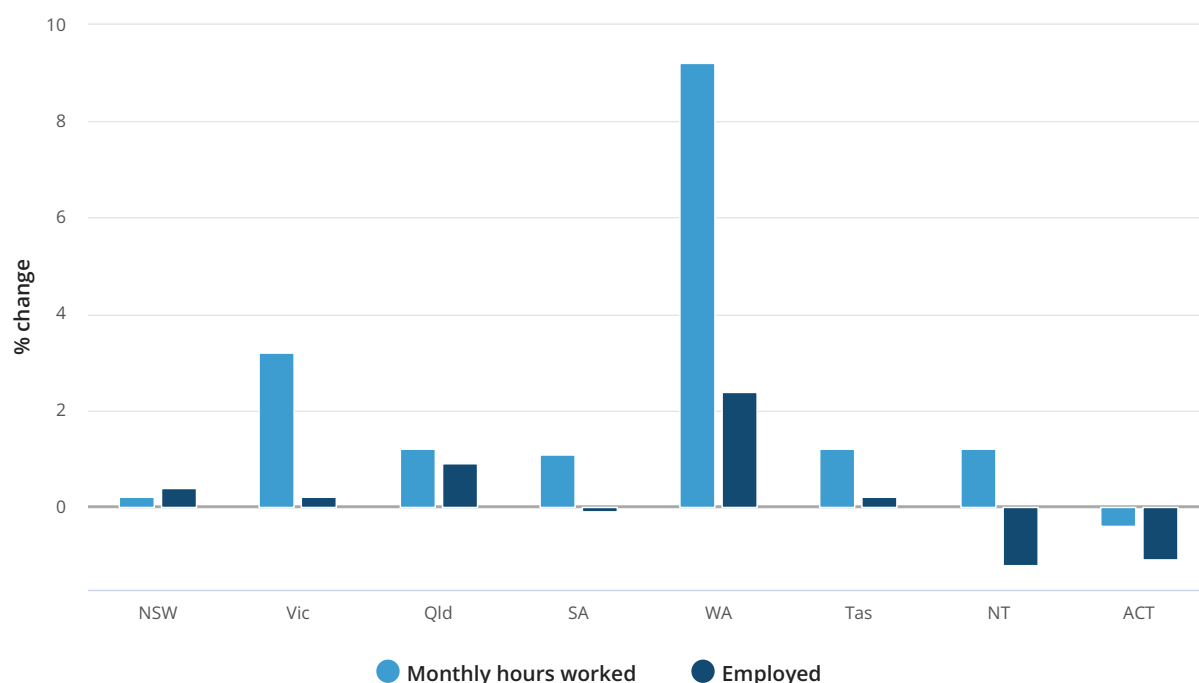


Source: Labour Force, Australia Tables 1 and 19

States and territories

Chart 3 shows the changes in employment and hours worked in March 2021. Since January 2021, hours worked in Victoria have continued to grow at a faster rate than employment. A 5-day lockdown in Western Australia in the first week of February resulted in a drop in hours worked in February 2021, and a strong recovery in March.

Chart 3: Monthly change in employment and hours worked, February to March 2021

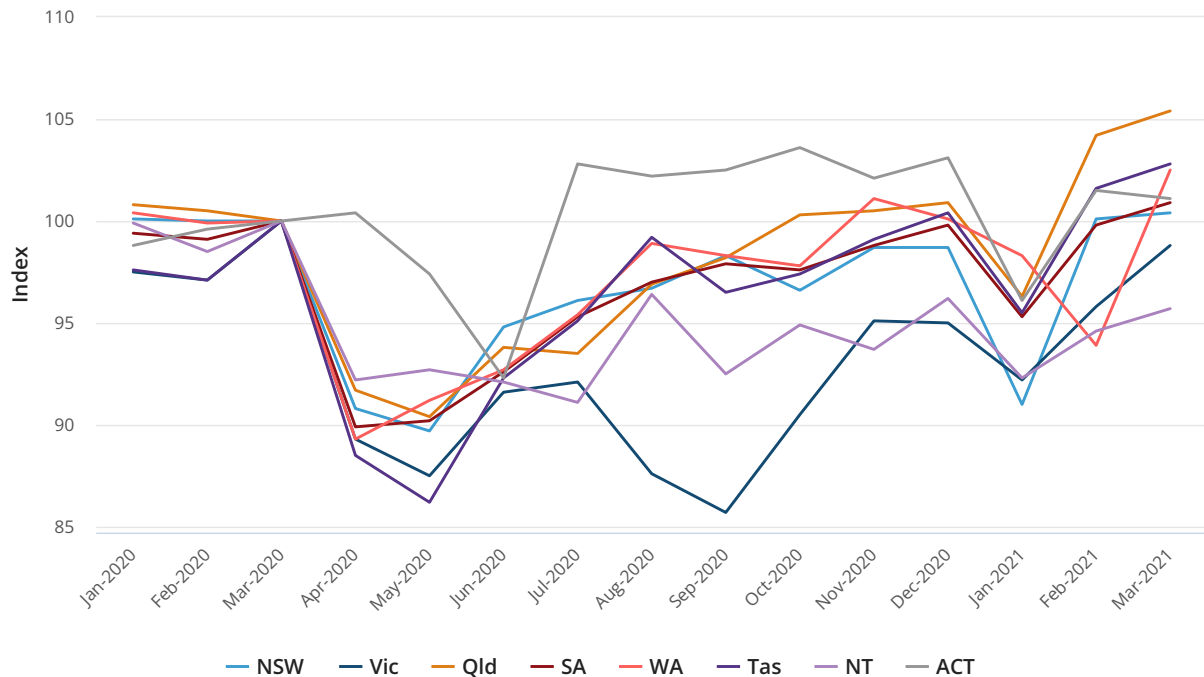


Source: Labour Force, Australia Tables 1 and 19

Chart 4 shows the changes in hours worked in the states and territories, indexed to March 2020. Hours worked in most states and territories had recovered to the level in March 2020, just before the start of the COVID pandemic. Only Victoria and the Northern Territory remained below their March 2020 level.

Hours worked have been impacted by lockdowns and other restrictions that have been in place across the country. The lockdowns in Victoria in the second half of 2020 resulted in falls in hours worked in August and September, and strong growth in recent months has seen them recover close to their March 2020 level.

Chart 4: Index of hours worked, Seasonally adjusted (March 2020 = 100)



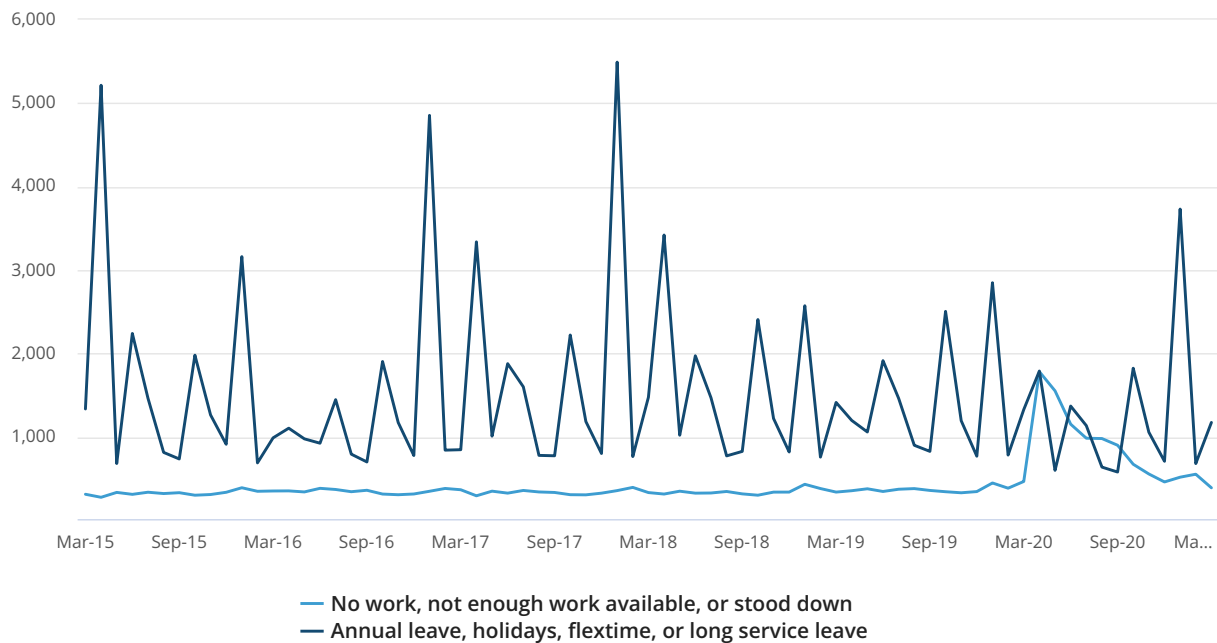
Source: Labour Force, Australia Tables 12, 12a, 19 and 19a

People working fewer hours

Chart 5 shows the number of people working fewer (or no) hours:

- for economic reasons - which, in March 2021, was almost 76,000 people (16%) below March 2020; and
- due to taking annual leave, holidays, flextime, or long service leave - which was around 1,170,000 people in March 2021, and around 150,000 (11%) below March 2020.

Chart 5: People working fewer than their usual hours, or no hours at all,
Selected reasons, Original

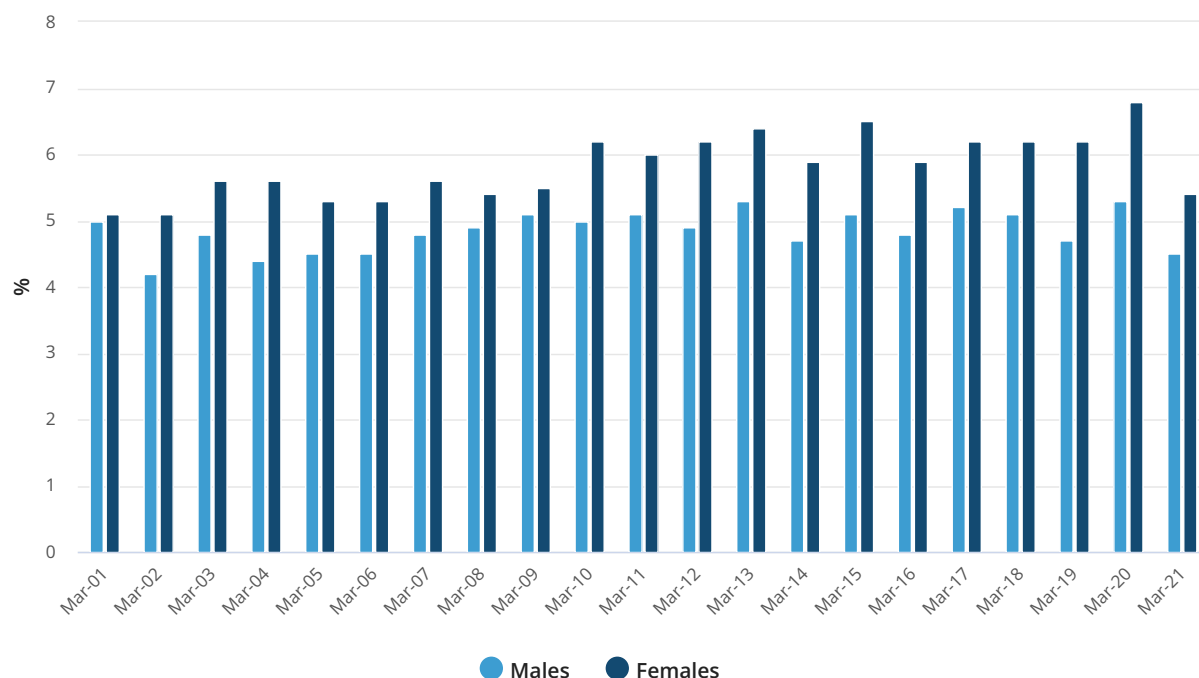


Source: Labour Force, Australia, Detailed Data Cube EM2a

People working zero hours

Chart 6 shows the proportion of employed people who worked zero hours in March over the past 20 years.

Chart 6: Proportion of employed working zero hours, Original

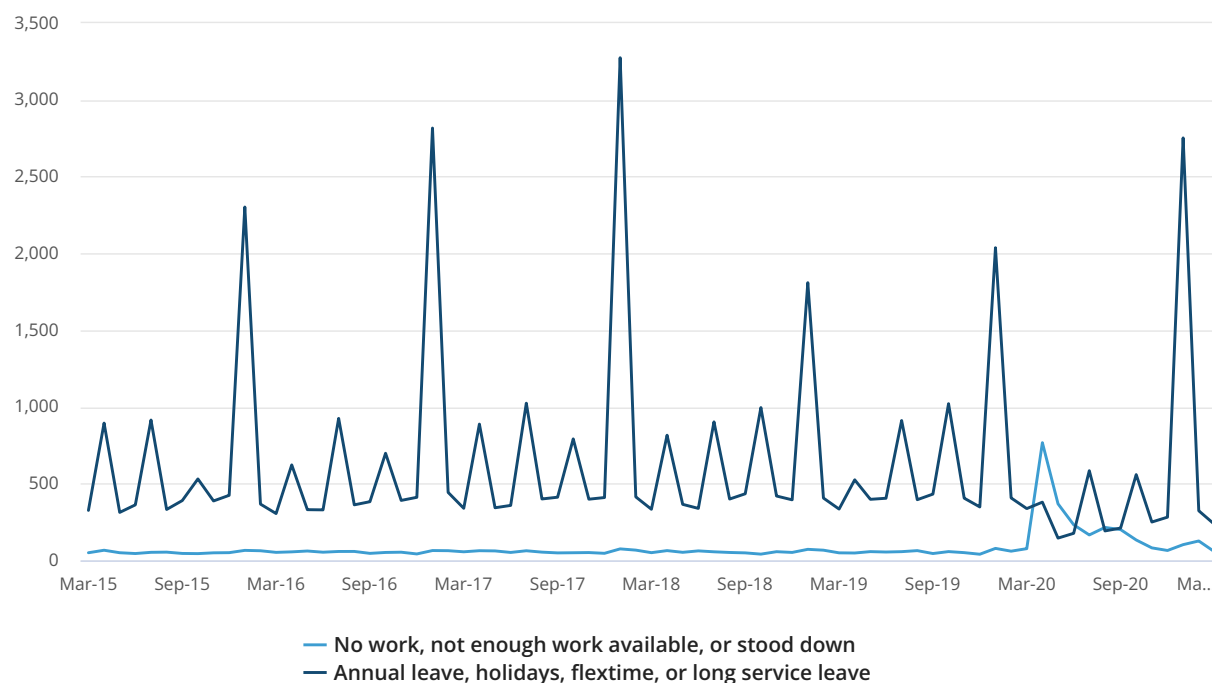


Source: Labour Force, Australia, Detailed Table 9

Chart 7 shows the number of people working zero hours for economic reasons, and due to taking annual leave, holidays, flextime, or long service leave. As with people working fewer hours, there is a distinct seasonal pattern to people taking leave, with large increases each January. In March 2021, over 230,000 employed people worked zero hours due to taking annual leave, holidays, flextime, or long service leave. This was a decrease on the 320,000 recorded in February.

The number of employed people working zero hours for economic reasons decreased from 127,000 in February 2021 to 57,000 in March 2021, well below the peak of 767,000 in April 2020, and less than in March 2020 (76,000).

Chart 7: Employed people working zero hours, Selected reasons, Original

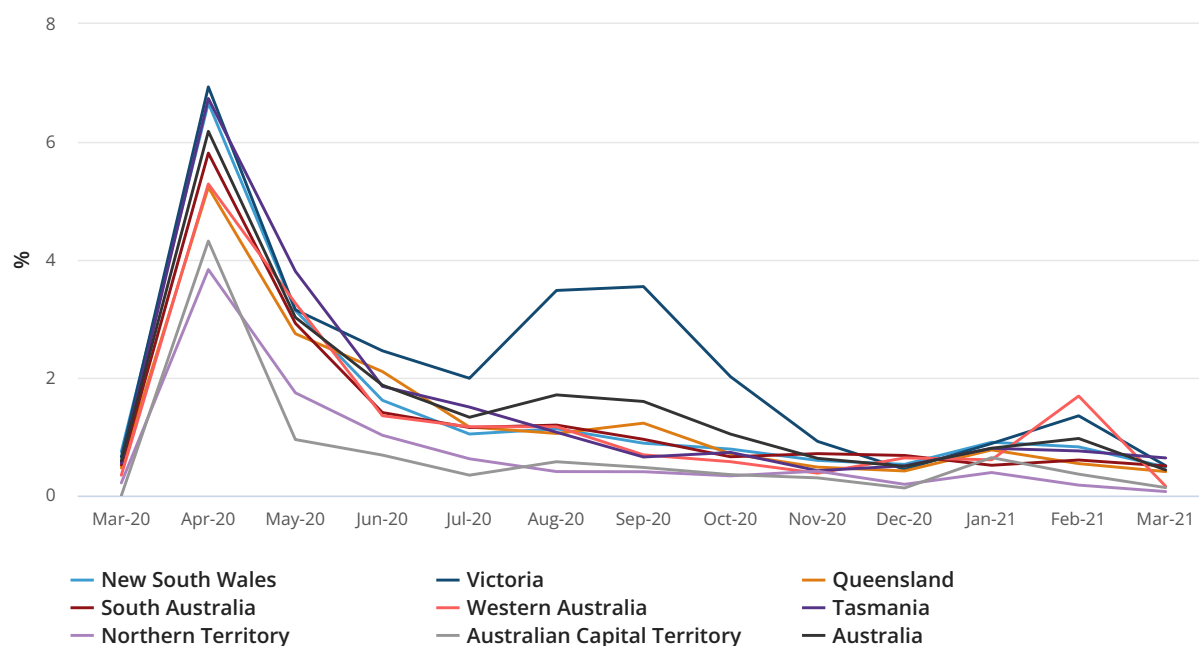


Source: Labour Force, Australia, Detailed Data Cube EM2a

Table 1 shows the number of employed people working zero hours for economic reasons in each state or territory, highlighting the very large increases in people working zero hours for economic reasons across the country in April, and the second wave impacts in Victoria in August and September. It also shows the effects of more recent lockdowns, including the lockdown in Western Australia in the first week of February.

Table 1: Employed people working zero hours for economic reasons, by Stat

	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-2
	('000)	('000)	('000)	('000)	('000)	('000)	('000)	('000)	('000)
New South Wales	30.8	261.1	121.5	63.8	41.7	45.6	35.9	32.0	
Victoria	22.7	229.7	102.7	80.6	65.3	112.2	113.0	66.1	
Queensland	12.0	126.8	64.9	51.0	28.4	26.4	31.1	18.2	



Source: Labour Force, Australia, Detailed Data Cube EM2b and Labour Force, Australia Table 12

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